



## Your Stories

This page will feature the selected short story, poem, or article of the month along with its English translation.

Bilingual writers, we would appreciate your help with the translation of Indonesian work into English. Please contact us at [dalangpublishing@gmail.com](mailto:dalangpublishing@gmail.com)

Please adhere to the following maximum word limits:

Short story – 3000 words.

Poem – 500 words / poem – please submit 5 poems on individual pages.

Article – 2000 words.

Please follow our Writer's Guidelines for formatting and other submission directions.

### Pohon Pongo



Everyone should view themselves in a philosophical way in order to find meaning in their life.

At age 46, **Rinto Andriano** survived a stroke, caused by a blockage in his brain vessels, which paralyzed the right side of his body. Writing was one of the healing activities his neurologist recommended as a means to restore his ability to reason. Rinto began to write in June 2018, six months after he had the stroke.

Prior to this, Rinto was a post-disaster recovery planner, who

worked extensively in various disaster sites throughout Indonesia and Asia. Now, during his post-stroke period, he is more involved in studies and online training and writing on post-disaster mitigations. In his spare time, Rinto likes to go for walks and read material with philosophical content regarding the protection of the natural environment.

Rinto writes to find meaning in his life, which now has limitations. Writing frees his soul and mind, both of which might have been constricted before his stroke, even though, at that time, he had no physical constraints.

Under the guidance of Ahmad Yulden Erwin, Rinto wrote a dozen short stories, which he compiled in an e-book titled *Kencan Hikikomori*, *Hikikomori's Courtship*.

Rinto now participates in an on-line writing workshop facilitated by Purwanti Kusumaningtyas and Lian Gouw at the University of Satya Wacana in Salatiga. Rinto's current writing project features the character of a beautiful, God-created creature who undergoes a gender change.

Rinto can be reached at [stubo.andriono@gmail.com](mailto:stubo.andriono@gmail.com).

### Pohon Pongo

Miranti terbangun dari tidurnya, dia berpeluh di tengah malam yang dingin. Napasnya tersengal-sengal. Di dalam kepala Miranti masih menggema bisikan Lukman baru saja.

"Mir, pergilah ke Pohon Tempat Memohon! Bawa serta Kasih bersamamu." Kata-kata Lukman begitu bening mengiang dalam tidurnya.

### Pongo's Caring Tree



**Novita Dewi** started writing poetry and short stories during her elementary and middle school days. She published in *Si Kuncung* and *Bobo*, children magazines, as well as wrote for the children's columns featured in *Kompas* and *Sinar Harapan* (now *Suara Pembaruan*). She now nurtures her interest in literature by writing articles about literature and translation for scientific journals. Novita is widely published. The short stories translated and published by Dalang Publishing are her first attempts of literary translation.

She currently teaches English literature courses at Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Novita can be reached at [novitadewi@usd.ac.id](mailto:novitadewi@usd.ac.id) or [novitadewi9@gmail.com](mailto:novitadewi9@gmail.com).

### Pongo's Caring Tree

Miranti awoke in the middle of the cold night, sweating and short of breath. Lukman's soft voice still echoed in her head.

"Mir, go to the Caring Tree! Take Kasih with you." Lukman's words had been clear in her sleep.

Miranti looked at Kasih, her daughter, sleeping next to her. Unlike her, Kasih was not soaked in perspiration. The air that night was unusually

Miranti menatap Kasih, putrinya yang sedang terlelap di sampingnya. Berbeda dengannya, tiada peluh yang membasahi badan Kasih. Udara malam itu memang sedang dingin, lumrahnya udara musim kemarau yang kering dan panas?

Miranti sudah tidak bisa lagi memicingkan mata. Malam terlalu rusuh dan hatinya sudah terlalu resah. Baru-baru ini dia sering bermimpi tentang Lukman, suaminya yang menghilang di tengah Rimba Raya Sebangau, di Kalimantan Tengah, sejak tiga tahun yang lalu. Berpuluh rombongan pencari sudah menghutan berbulan untuk mencari suaminya. Namun sampai kehabisan perbekalan, hasilnya selalu hampa. Sehampa hati Miranti yang kembali menjadi separuh setelah biasanya penuh bersama Lukman.

Lulusan dari Kedokteran Hewan Institute Pertanian Bogor, Miranti sekarang bekerja sebagai perawat kesehatan orangutan-orangutan untuk Taman Nasional Sebangau dalam kerja sama dengan Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation, BOSF. Kedukaan mendalam karena kehilangan suaminya membuat Miranti enggan kembali ke Bogor, kota kelahirannya. Pengetahuannya tentang siloka yang diwarisi dari para karuhun Sunda membuat Miranti yakin bahwa kekasihnya masih hidup di suatu tempat di hutan raya Kalimantan ini. Dalam bisikan mimpi Miranti, Lukman sedang mempersiapkan sesuatu untuk masa depan mereka dan anaknya, untuk kehidupan yang pernah mereka impikan hidup menyatu dengan hutan. Untuk itu, Miranti yakin, dia dan Kasih putri mereka, hanya perlu menunggu waktunya tiba.

"Lukman, aku tahu kau akan datang untuk menjemput kami, tapi kapan? Aku sudah lelah," ratap Miranti sambil mendekap Kasih.

Miranti termenung, dia mengingat kembali kata demi kata percakapan mereka sebelum Lukman beranjak dari pelukannya demi nasib hutan yang mereka cintai. Dalam mimpinya malam itu, Miranti seolah terlempar ke masa lalu, memang belakangan ini garis waktu semakin semena-mena melengkung dari masa kini ke masa lalu Miranti. Dan Lukman berganti-ganti antara hidup dan tiada. Ingin rasanya Miranti tidak pernah tersadar dari mimpinya, dimana Lukman nyata bersamanya.

"Aku akan pergi sebentar. Jaga baik-baik anak kita, ya," Lukman berkata kepada Miranti pada hari buruk yang selalu mengawan di hati Miranti dan membuat hari-harinya kelabu.

Miranti masih mengingat jelas kata-kata yang timbul dari hati risanya itu. "Apakah kau tidak bisa menunda kepergianmu?"

"Tidak, aku hanya hendak memenuhi baktiku."

"Tetapi terlalu berbahaya, para preman kebun sawit sedang mencarimu."

"Sang Roh adalah segala cahaya hidupku, aku hanyalah pantulan cahayanya." Itu yang dikatakan Lukman saat itu, saat mereka beradu mulut tentang bahaya yang mengancam Lukman selaku rimbawan pegiat kelestarian.

Miranti teringat saat dia mencegah, "Ya, tetapi keadaan di Taman Nasional Sebangau sedang genting, mereka masih kesal karena kau gagalkan upaya mereka menyerobot wilayah taman."

Miranti tahu, Lukman bukannya tidak sungguh-sungguh memikirkan ucapannya. Miranti merasa Lukman sedang menghadapi buah simalakama. Miranti teringat melihat Lukman termenung, menghentikan gerak tangannya membungkus barang-barang. Lukman pasti ingat belaka betapa dia dan kawan-kawan suku Dayak Ngaju telah mempermalukan para pengusaha sawit dengan bukti penyerobotan kawasan taman.

"Cahaya yang membimbingku ke sana segera," Lukman menukas, setelah menyingkirkan semua kebimbangan.

"Mereka tak kan berhenti berusaha memperluas kebun sawitnya hingga ke dalam wilayah taman, Roh memang sudah membimbingmu tapi bisakah kau melakukannya nanti?"

"Tidak bisa, Sayang, mungkin darmaku sedang dibutuhkan hutan ini sekarang, percayalah!" Lukman berusaha menenangkannya.

"Ya, tapi waktunya itu lho yang tidak tepat!"

Lukman tidak menggubris penyanggahannya.

Kemudian hening melingkupi keduanya, mereka terdiam menahan kerisauan masing-masing. Malam itu, Lukman pergi dan menghilang

cold for the hot, dry season.

Miranti could not fall back asleep. The night had been too restless, and now, she too felt unsettled. Recently, she'd been dreaming about Lukman often — Lukman, her husband, who had disappeared in the Rimba Raya Sebangau, a jungle in Central Kalimantan, three years ago. For months, numerous search-and-rescue units looked for her husband. But although they searched until they ran out of supplies, they always came back empty-handed — as empty as the half of Miranti's heart that was usually filled with Lukman's presence.

A graduate of the Veterinary School of the Bogor Agricultural Institute, Miranti worked as a veterinarian, in collaboration with the Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation, BOSF, at the Sebangau National Park, a large nature reserve that was carved out of the Rimba Raya Sebangau jungle. She was in charge of the welfare of the orangutan population in the park. The deep sorrow of losing her husband made Miranti reluctant to return to Bogor, her hometown. Miranti inherited her knowledge of siloka, a mystical cultural belief, from her Sundanese karuhun, ancestors. Siloka convinced her that Lukman was still alive somewhere in the Kalimantan jungle. In Miranti's dream, Lukman was preparing something for their family's future, for the life they had dreamed of: a life in union with the forest.

Miranti believed that she and their daughter Kasih just needed to wait for the right time. "Lukman, I know you'll come for us, but when?" Miranti whimpered, holding Kasih. "I'm so tired."

Miranti remembered their conversation, word for word, the day Lukman walked out of her embrace for the sake of their beloved forest. In her dream that night, it was as if she were thrown into the past. Indeed, lately she often moved back and forth in time, while Lukman alternated between life and nothing. Miranti wished she would never wake up from her dream, where Lukman was with her.

"I'll be gone for a while," Lukman had said to her on that terrible day that always darkened Miranti's heart and saddened her days. "Take good care of our child, will you?"

"Can't you delay your trip?" Miranti clearly remembered the words that had risen from her troubled mind.

"No, I need to fulfill my duty."

"But it is too dangerous; the palm oil thugs are looking for you."

"The Spirit is the light of my life; I am only a reflection of its light." That was what Lukman always said when they argued about the dangers that threatened him as a forester and conservation activist.

"Yes, but the situation in Sebangau National Park is precarious; the palm oil thugs are still upset because you prevented them from invading the park area." Miranti remembered her effort to keep Lukman from leaving.

She knew that Lukman was not really ignoring her fear; she knew Lukman was faced with a dilemma. Lukman had stopped his packing to think for a while. She now wondered if he had been remembering then how he and his friends from the Dayak Ngaju tribe had humiliated the palm oil entrepreneurs with evidence of their invasion into the park area.

"The light is leading me to it right now," Lukman had finally said, after clearing all his doubts.

"They won't stop trying to expand their palm plantations into the park area," Miranti had persisted. "Yes, Roh, the Spirit, has already guided you, but can't you do it later?"

"I can't, honey." Lukman had tried to calm her. "It seems that this forest needs my service right now. Trust me!"

"Yes, but the timing is not right."

Lukman ignored her refutation.

In the silence that followed, they each held their own worries. That night, Lukman disappeared into the jungle.

Environmental activist and forester friends suspected that Lukman had been killed in the midst of the disaster that was sweeping the forest. Some people believed that his disappearance expressed revenge from the plantation foremen against Lukman's activism. The foremen considered Lukman the perpetrator in blocking the encroachment of the expanding palm plantations into the Sebangau National Park. But they had no proof.

begitu saja di dalam rimba.

Kawan-kawan rimbawan pegiat lingkungan menduga Lukman telah dilaporkan di tengah prahara yang melanda hutan. Beberapa orang mempercayainya bahwa inilah bentuk balas dendam dari para mandor kebun karena Lukman telah giat menggalang perlindungan bagi hutan. Mereka seperti menganggap Lukman sebagai pelaku penjevalan terhadap perluasan kebun sawit yang jauh menjorok ke Taman Nasional Sebangau. Namun tidak ada yang bisa membuktikan kebenarannya.

Itu adalah adu mulut terakhir Lukman dengannya. Miranti terhenyak dari lamunannya. Dia menghela nafas sambil mengusap kening Kasih yang mulai terbangun.

Miranti mendengar sayup-sayup lolongan dan seruan orangutan. Miranti menajamkan telinganya.

Para orangutan berida terdengar memimpin barzanji. Miranti semakin risau, dia tahu belaka bahwa orangutan adalah mahluk batiniah yang bisa turut merasakan nasib rimba. Mereka seolah bisa mendengar senandung paduan suara hutan yang makin lama makin lirih dan parau. Itu adalah nyanyian hutan yang sedang sekarat. Hanya orangutan-orangutan paham benar dengan suara itu.

Pagi kembali menyingsing dengan kesibukan Miranti pada tugas-tugas perawatan orangutan. Banyak orangutan yang diselamatkan para jagawana dari taman nasional mengalami luka bakar parah, lemas dan kekurangan air. Sisi timur Taman yang berdekatan dengan wilayah Ibu Kota Negara di Sepaku, wilayah Penajam Paser Utara, mulai terbakar. Banyak satwa liar dan orangutan terluka.

Untungnya semua kejadian pilu ini tidaklah mempengaruhi masa kecil Kasih. Sebagai anak yang selalu ingin tahu, Kasih setiap hari mengikuti perjalanan para jagawana memberikan makan pada orangutan. Kasih begitu menyukai kegiatan ugahari bersama para jagawana itu. Bahkan dia sering tidak menghabiskan buah makan siangnya. Dia sangat suka menyisakan bekal buahnya untuk Pongo, anak orangutan kesayangannya. Mereka adalah dua makhluk berlainan jenis, tapi nampak seperti telah lama saling kenal. Mereka sering saling mengulurkan tangan, bertukar ubi dengan pisang. Kadang mereka kedapatan sedang bermain bersama. Sementara itu Laksmi, ibu Pongo, dan Miranti sama-sama hanya mengawasi dari kejauhan.

"Bu, ayo kasih makan Pongo dan Laksmi ...." Kasih merajuk ibunya. Miranti melihat dari jendelanya dua orangutan itu sudah menanti di luar, di pinggir hutan.

Miranti dan Kasih beranjak menemui Laksmi dan Pongo.

Laksmi adalah orangutan betina dewasa, yang sudah hampir dua puluh tahun hidup di Taman Nasional Sebangau. Di balik bulunya, tubuh Laksmi penuh dengan carut bekas luka, yang dia peroleh dari para mandor, semenjak maraknya perkebunan sawit di situ. Berangkat dari pengalaman itulah, Laksmi menjadi orangutan yang selalu waspada. Nyawanya pernah hampir melayang bila tidak diselamatkan oleh para jagawana, akibat siksaan mandor yang kejam. Mirantilah yang memberinya nama Laksmi. Ia adalah salah satu induk orangutan di Taman dan sekaligus penyintas yang ulet. Laksmi menjadi orangutan yang selalu waspada.

Pagi ini kabar kebakaran taman semakin meluas. Gambut yang kering karena kemarau yang panjang menjadi penghantar api yang baik. Kebakaran tidak dari ujung dahan yang hijau, namun bara merayap dari dasar akar tanah gambut tak terkendali. Bau kayu lembab yang terbakar mulai menguar dihantarkan asap putih menebal campuran uap air dan zat asam arang. Satwa-satwa dan penduduk kampung tepi rimba pun sesak nafas dibuatnya.

Laksmi menatap Miranti tak seperti biasa. Matanya yang coklat terasa menghampiri hati Miranti dengan kepiluan mendalam. Miranti mahfum. Dia tahu belaka soal kabar kebakaran itu. Dia merasa, Laksmi punya rasa yang sama tentang kebakaran itu. Mereka ibu yang sama-sama risau dengan keselamatan dirinya dan anaknya. Seolah ada satu pertanyaan yang mempertautkan keduanya. Akanlah mereka masih bisa menemukan hari esok yang kembali menghiu?

Sesaat kemudian, tempat pemberian makan para orangutan menjadi riuh. Para orangutan yang sedang sarapan seolah tiba-tiba menyahut sebuah panggilan dari dalam rimba. Miranti turut menoleh ke arah rimba. Laksmi sontak menjadi gelisah. Sejenak dia menatap Miranti tanpa bersuara. Lalu, sambil mengerang, Laksmi menarik tangan Pongo untuk kembali menghutan.

That was Lukman's last argument with her.

Miranti broke out of her daydream. Kasih started to wake up. Sighing, Miranti rubbed the child's forehead. She looked up when she heard the screeching and screams interspersed with the soulful calling of the orangutans in the forest.

The senior orangutans were leading the barzanji, a litany of woe. Miranti's worry heightened. Orangutans were creatures who shared the fate of the jungle. They seemed able to hear the song of the dying jungle. The chorus, which grew fainter and sounded hoarse from time to time. Only orangutans understood that voice.

The morning came and presented Miranti with tasks to care for the orangutans in the national park. Many of the rescued orangutans were weak from dehydration and suffered from severe burns. The Penajam Paser Utara region, at the eastern side of the park adjacent to the state capital area in Sepaku, had caught fire, injuring many orangutans and other wild animals.

Fortunately, these many sad events did not affect Kasih's childhood. Every day, Kasih followed the rangers as they fed the orangutans. Kasih truly enjoyed this daily activity. In fact, she often saved her fruit from lunch for Pongo, her favorite orangutan. Although she and Pongo were two creatures of different species, they didn't act like it. They often reached out to each other, as if they had known each other for a long time, and sometimes Pongo exchanged sweet potatoes for bananas. They played together while Miranti and Laksmi, Pongo's mother, just watched from a distance.

"Mom, let's feed Pongo and Laksmi!" Kasih nudged her mother. Miranti looked out of the window and saw the two orangutans waiting outside, at the edge of the forest.

Miranti and Kasih went to meet Laksmi and Pongo.

Laksmi had lived in the Sebangau National Park for almost twenty years. Amid her fur, her skin was mottled with scars evidence of the cruel plantation foremen who had arrived in the park along with the development of the palm plantations. Laksmi quickly became a wary orangutan. If a ranger had not rescued her, she would have died from the foremen's torture. Miranti gave her the name Laksmi. One of the resilient survivors in the park, Laksmi remained vigilant of her surroundings.

That morning's news had reported that the park fires had spread. The dry peat, a result of the long drought, was a good conductor of fire. The fires did not spread from the tips of green branches, but rather crept uncontrollably along the peat-covered soil. The smell of burning damp wood wafted through the area. A mixture of water vapor and carbonic acid filled the air with thick white smoke, which made it hard for the animals and the village inhabitants at the edge of the forest to breathe.

Laksmi gave Miranti an unusual look. Her brown eyes seemed to reach out with a deep sorrow. Miranti understood. She felt she and Laksmi shared the same feelings about the fire. They were both mothers who worried about their safety and their children's. It seemed that one question connected the two of them: Would they still be able to find a green forest in the future?

Suddenly, the orangutans having breakfast stopped eating and became very noisy. They seemed to answer a call from the jungle. Miranti looked towards the woods.

Barzanji again? They just did it. Miranti felt goosebumps. When the orangutans repeated barzanji again and again, it was as if they were asking, "What's wrong with the life of this forest?"

Laksmi became restless. For a moment, she stared silently at Miranti then grunting, grabbed Pongo's hand, and turned back to the woods.

Miranti saw that Pongo was reluctant to go with his mother. He was still busy munching on the sweet potato Kasih had just given him. But Laksmi's instinct urged her to move to the other side of the forest. Pongo waved at Kasih, who was disappointed by Pongo's and Laksmi's unusual behavior.

Aware of the precarious orangutan atmosphere, Miranti held Kasih's hand.

"Why did they leave so quickly, Mom?" Kasih asked.

"They must face the Spirit of the jungle."

"Barzanji lagi? Tadi sudah." Miranti merasa merinding ketika para orangutan itu semakin sering barzanji, seolah mereka bertanya, "Apa yang salah dengan kehidupan hutan ini?"

Miranti melihat Pongo enggan mengikuti ibunya. Ia masih sibuk menghisap daging ubi yang manis yang baru saja diberikan kepadanya oleh Kasih. Namun sepertinya hati Laksmi sudah terpanggil ke sisi lain hutan. Pongo melambatkan tangannya pada Kasih yang kecewa dengan tingkah Pongo dan Laksmi yang tidak biasa.

Mawas dengan suasana orangutan yang tampak genting, Miranti juga menggenggam tangan Kasih yang sedang penuh tanda tanya.

"Kenapa mereka pergi cepat kembali menghutan, Bu?" tanya Kasih.

"Mereka harus menghadap Sang Roh Rimba."

Kasih tidak puas dengan jawaban ibunya, tetapi dia harus bergegas mengikuti langkah ibunya yang juga tergesa-gesa kembali ke pusat perawatan.

Sesampainya di Pusat Perawatan, Kasih masih tidak terima. Dia masih memberondong ibunya dengan pertanyaan-pertanyaan atas apa yang baru saja dialaminya di pinggir hutan.

"Siapaakah Sang Roh Rimba?" cecar Kasih.

"Dia adalah kekuatan atas segala kekuatan yang menghidupi segala sesuatu di dalam hutan. Dia yang menghidupkan dan mematikan semua yang ada di dalam rimba."

"Termasuk Ayah?" Tanya Kasih.

Pelan dan lirih Miranti menjawab, "Iya ...."

Dalam benak Miranti, dia tertegun dengan pertanyaan Kasih baru saja. Miranti pun baru beberapa hari ini merasa bahwa Lukman tidak mati. Dia tinggal bersama Sang Roh Hutan dan belakangan sering mengunjunginya di dalam mimpi. Mimpi-mimpi yang membuatnya risau sepanjang hari.

Dalam pengamatan Miranti, hidup terberat Laksmi, Pongo dan para orangutan adalah saat musim kering. Saat kemarau seperti ini hutan akan penuh asap, banyak pohon yang terbakar. Mereka juga kesulitan memperoleh makanan. Laksmi dan Pongo sering hanya mengandalkan sedikit ubi dan pisang dari Taman Nasional, sekadar untuk ganjal. Makanan sedang susah didapat.

Jatah makan dari Taman Nasional hanya diberikan satu kali sehari. Pongo dan kawan-kawan masih lapar. Karena mereka rindu akan pucuk daun dan buah manis yang makin susah didapat saat kemarau, mereka menyerbu umbut sawit di kebun sawit pinggiran Taman Nasional Sebangau. Makanan yang bila tak hati-hati, akan menghadiahkan bilur pegal dan ruam panas di badan, akibat siksaan para mandor. Para mandor sering mengusir orangutan kelaparan dengan senapan angin, air panas, racun babi hutan atau cairan asam.

Sepengalaman Miranti, pada musim kemarau putih penuh asap seperti ini, orangutan-orangutan sering berkumpul di Pohon Agung di penjuru Taman. Mereka bersama-sama barzanji dipimpin oleh orangutan berida. Mereka menyerahkan jiwa dan tubuh yang sedang kelaparan ini pada Sang Roh yang kali ini mewujudkan sebagai Pohon Agung, bersama dengan kelaparan, api yang melelehkan kulit dan asap yang membuat sesak nafas. Semua itu adalah jelmaan Sang Roh Rimba.

Pohon Agung tempat mereka barzanji adalah pohon berbuah buni. Bijinya yang lezat disukai orangutan, tupai, dan burung-burung. Batangnya besar, dahannya kekar, kulit batangnya obat yang mujarab, jerubung yang rimbun merupakan rumah buat aneka satwa termasuk orangutan. Akar Pohon Agung itu kuat dan menancap dalam untuk menahan perawakan yang tinggi besar. Pohon Werkodara demikian Kasih dan Miranti yang berdarah Parahiyangan menyebut pohon besar sekeluarga Pohon Bodhi ini.

Miranti sudah beberapa kali menyaksikan dalam tugasnya sebagai dokter orangutan di hutan, bagaimana sekumpulan orangutan menampilkan kerisauan mereka dengan barzanji. Para berida seperti kesurupan, mereka berayun, melolong, meraung dan terus mencoba meraih dahan, daun, dan ranting pohon. Ini pohon bukan sembarang pohon, ini adalah Pohon Tempat Memohon. Orangutan itu seolah menyerahkan seluruh jiwa dan tubuhnya untuk dirasuk roh.

Selama delapan tahun bekerja, Miranti berpendapat bahwa para orangutan itu adalah mahluk yang sangat rohaniyah. Meskipun mereka

Kasih was hardly satisfied with that answer, but her mother was hurrying the two of them back to the Care Centre.

Kasih was still full of curiosity. She kept bombarding her mother with questions about the experience at the edge of the forest. "Who is the Spirit of the jungle?" Kasih probed.

"He is the power of all forces that support everything in the forest. He is the one who regulates everything in the jungle."

"Including Dad?" asked Kasih.

"Yes," Miranti replied, slowly and softly.

Kasih's question stunned Miranti. She had only recently began feeling that Lukman was still alive. In her mind, he lived with the Spirit and, lately, had begun visiting her in dreams that bothered her all day long.

In Miranti's observations, the hardest time for Laksmi, Pongo, and the other orangutans to survive was the dry season, when many trees burned, filling the forest with smoke. Food was scarce. Laksmi and Pongo often relied on a few sweet potatoes and bananas from the Sebangau National Park rangers, which was barely enough to keep the hunger pangs away. Food rations were given only once a day and left Pongo and his friends still hungry. Starving for the now-scarce tender leaves and sweet fruit of the forest, the orangutans ransacked the palm shoots sprouting from the tree tops at the plantations on the outskirts of Sebangau National Park. If the orangutans weren't careful, their rampaging for food could result in injury or death. The plantation foremen used air guns, hot water, wild boar poison, or acid to get rid of the hungry apes.

Miranti knew that during this white, smoke-filled dry season, orangutans often gathered at the Caring Tree across the park. Led by the berida, a senior orangutan, they performed a litany of woe: surrendering their starving bodies, suffocated by the smoke and sinched by the fire, to the Spirit, manifested this time as the Caring Tree. It was all the manifestation of the Spirit of the jungle.

The Caring Tree, where they performed their barzanji, was a buni tree, an offshoot of the bodhi tree family. Its delicious seeds were treats for orangutans, squirrels, and birds. The trunk was large, the branches were stout, the bark contained an effective medicine, and the lush canopy was a home for various animals, including orangutans. The roots of the Caring Tree were strong and bored deep into the soil to uphold the tree's enormous stature. Kasih and Sundanese-blooded Miranti, knew this big tree to be the werkodara tree.

As a veterinarian, Miranti had observed several times how a group of orangutans performed a barzanji to express their anxiety. During the ritual, the elderly orangutans appeared entranced. They swung, screeching, from branch to branch while ripping branches, leaves, and twigs of a big tree which was no ordinary tree. It was the Caring Tree where the orangutans seemed to surrender their entire bodies and souls to the Spirit of the jungle.

During her eight years of working at the center, Miranti had concluded that orangutans were very spiritual creatures. Even though they acted possessed during the barzanji, they were actually facing the jungle's Spirit. Miranti believed in the orangutans' sincerity.

During this most recent barzanji, Miranti believed that the old orangutan's roar said, "The Spirit will surely take care of us. He is present everywhere, in the good, as well as in the bad." With a strong moan, the elderly orangutan continued, as if saying, "The Spirit is the one we fear and miss at the same time."

The boisterousness in the forest died down. Miranti imagined the orangutans' barzanji had finished. In Miranti's mind, the orangutans were not blaming the Spirit for the prolonged fire and hunger. They never accused. Nor did they plead for punishment of the cruel foremen or the greedy palm oil barons. Orangutans were not vengeful. They merely surrendered themselves to the balance of nature. They believed that nature was just a pendulum swinging between points of equilibrium, and they would simply accept the fact if the pendulum's movement meant the extinction of their kind.

Miranti was sure that the forest's hoarse singing was heard by the orangutans who had gathered to perform a barzanji. Humans, with too many demands and preconceived notions, could not hear the song of the forest. Only innocent creatures could hear that song and the raucous feelings of the trees embedded in the jungle floor. Only the forest creatures could hear the baritone of an old mahogany tree, a



seolah kesurupan saat barzanji, sebenarnya mereka sedang menghadap Roh Rimba. Miranti percaya pada ketulusan hati orangutan.

Pada saat barzanji, Miranti merasa seekor orangutan berida tertua meraung berkata, "Roh pasti akan memelihara kita. Dia hadir di mana-mana, sebagai yang baik dan yang buruk."

Dengan raungan yang kuat orangutan berida itu lanjut seperti berkata, "Dia yang kita takuti, tapi sekaligus yang kita rindukan."

Riuh di hutan mereda. Miranti membayangkan barzanji para orangutan telah selesai. Menurut Miranti memang para orangutan itu bukan sedang menggugat Sang Roh atas kebakaran dan kelaparan yang berkepanjangan ini. Mereka tak pernah menggugat. Mereka tak pula sedang memohon azab bagi para mandor yang kejam atau para cukong sawit yang serakah. Mereka bukan pendendam. Mereka hanya menyerahkan diri mereka pada keseimbangan alam. Mereka percaya bahwa alam hanyalah bandul yang bergerak di antara titik keseimbangan. Mereka ikhlas-ikhlas saja bila dalam pergerakan bandulan itu berarti adalah kepunahan jenis mereka.

Miranti yakin, hutan yang bernyanyi dengan parau inilah yang didengar oleh para orangutan yang tadi berkumpul melakukan barzanji. Hal ini tidak bisa didengar oleh manusia yang terlalu banyak tuntutan dan praduga. Hanya makhluk yang luguluh yang bisa mendengarkan nyanyian hutan dan riuhnya pertautan perasaan pohon-pohon di dalam jaringan syaraf di dasar rimba. Hanya merekalah yang bisa mendengar suara bariton pohon mahoni tua, suara sopran pohon ulin yang kokoh atau suara tenor pohon meranti yang tinggi langsing. Pada hutan yang sehat, suara-suara itu menjadi sebuah senandung paduan yang merdu.

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Kebakaran hutan Taman Nasional Sebangau pada puncak kemarau 2019 sungguh hebat. Kebakaran terjadi bersamaan dengan rencana pembangunan Kawasan Sepaku, Penajem Paser Utara sebagai ibukota negara yang baru. Ibukota yang lama telah terlampaui banyak beban. Pemerintah meniatkan membangun ibukota yang baru dengan gagasan lapis sanding antara manusia dengan alam. Namun, seperti halnya pelaksanaan gagasan tersebut banyak kecolongan dalam penerapannya. Kebakaran adalah cara yang paling hemat dan mudah untuk membuka hutan.

Taman Nasional Sebangau pun ikut terbakar hebat. Bara api begitu dalam dan luas membakar jaringan syaraf akar di dasar rimba. Hutan sekarat. Udara pengap, zat asam berubah menjadi asam arang yang mematikan kehidupan. Senandung paduan suara pohon-pohon tertelan riuh gemertak dahan yang terbakar menjauhi kebakaran yang tak kunjung ada ujungnya. Mereka terpontang-panting menjauh. Kelelahan dan nafasnya sesak zat asam arang. Akhirnya jatuh dan terpanggang.

Orang-orang mengungsi keluar kota atau bersembunyi di dalam rumah. Mereka yang tidak memiliki kemewahan mengungsi ke pulau yang aman, akan bersembunyi saja di dalam rumah.

Miranti sangat berat hati untuk mengungsi. Perasaannya akan kehadiran Lukman justru semakin menguat di saat genting ini. Namun demi kesehatan Kasih, Miranti pun terpaksa memesan tiket pesawat dengan masygul. Menghadapi kenyataan seperti ini, hati Miranti seperti hendak terbelah ke dua sisi yang berbeda.

Gerak hatinya mengajaknya tetap di sini untuk tetap dekat dengan Lukman. Namun, kewarasan pikirannya berkata lain. Belakangan ini, penampakan Lukman semakin nyata di dalam mimpi dan lamunannya. Dia semakin mengejawantah dalam keseharian Miranti. Seolah dia menemani.

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Pagi Rabu itu, di puncak kemarau tahun 2019, kelabu menutup langit Taman Nasional Sebangau. Seolah paham dengan perasaan ibunya, Kasih pun nampak bergeming untuk tidak pergi dari Kompleks Perumahan Taman Nasional Sebangau. Kasih selalu mengkhawatirkan nasib Pongo. Kekawatiran ini bertambah sejak Pongo dan Laksmi meninggalkannya dengan tiba-tiba beberapa hari lalu di tempat pemberian jatah makan orangutan.

"Ayo, kita ke tempat pemberian makan orangutan!" renek Kasih pagi itu.

Sudah dua hari ini, karena kelangkaan pasokan bahan baku, Pengelola Taman sementara menghentikan pemberian makan kepada orangutan.

sturdy ironwood's soprano, or the tenor of the tall, slender meranti tree. In a healthy forest, the voices would turn into a melodious chorus.

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The Sebangau National Park's forest fires at the peak of the 2019 dry season were enormous. The fires occurred at the same time as the plan to develop Kawasan Sepaku, Penajem Paser Utara, as the new capital of Indonesia. The old capital had become too outdated. The Indonesian government intended to build a new capital, with the idea to juxtapose humans and nature. However, the implementation of these ideas encountered their own problems: fire was the most economical and easy way to clear forests.

The flames were so intense and widespread that they burned the root networks beneath the jungle floor. Now, the forest was dying. The air was stuffy, and acidic substances turned into deadly charcoal. The crackle of burning branches choked the trees' choir.

The chirpy larks tried to escape the never-ending fire. Fatigued and short of breath from the carbonic acid in the air, the birds fluttered frantically. They finally fell and were roasted.

People fled from the city. Those who did not have the luxury of fleeing to safety hid in their homes.

Miranti was very reluctant to leave. Her sense of Lukman's presence was even stronger at this critical time. But for the sake of Kasih's health, Miranti was, miserably, forced to book a plane ticket. Facing this reality, Miranti's heart split into two.

While Miranti's rational mind urged her to leave, her emotional impulses urged her to stay near the forest, to stay close to Lukman. His presence had become more and more evident in her dreams and fantasies. He was increasingly present in Miranti's daily life. It was as if he were keeping her company.

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That eventful Wednesday morning, at the peak of the 2019 dry season, the skies of Sebangau National Park were gray. As if she understood her mother's feelings, Kasih wasn't interested in leaving the Sebangau National Park housing complex. Kasih was worried about Pongo. Her concern had grown after Pongo and Laksmi had suddenly left her at the orangutan feeding site, a few days ago.

"Come on, let's go to the orangutan feeding place!" Kasih cajoled her mother that morning, not knowing that the park had temporarily stopped feeding the orangutans due to scarce supplies.

"But there is no ranger to feed them there," Miranti said.

"I want to see Pongo," Kasih pleaded.

"The rangers are busy," said Miranti, trying to convince her. "They're helping out with the forest fires."

"That's okay," insisted Kasih. "We can go by ourselves."

Finally, Miranti gave up. However, she used her consent as a bargaining chip with Kasih. "But if after we visit, we are forced to flee to Bogor, you must come with me without fussing." Miranti spoke half-heartedly; she, herself, was reluctant to leave, despite what her common sense told her.

Kasih nodded, but Miranti doubted that Kasih's nod was sincere. She wondered if Kasih saw another way of salvation, one she could not verbalize.

Miranti placed an air filter mask over Kasih's nose and mouth. The orangutan feeding site was only a short walking distance away, but this morning, it seemed to be so far. Feeling very anxious, Miranti placed several small oxygen cylinders in her backpack, along with water and a few snacks.

The Sebangau National Park was dark and dreadfully smoky. The sky was orange, as if it too were on fire. The air was horribly hot.

When Miranti and Kasih arrived at the feeding site, the usually busy place was now deserted and gray. There were no happy orangutan sounds.

"Pongo, come here!" Kasih called out cheerfully.

Miranti remained speechless.

"Tapi tidak ada jagawana yang memberikan makan di sana," kata Miranti.

"Aku ingin ketemu Pongo." Kasih memaksa.

"Para jagawana sedang sibuk, mereka membantu pemadaman kebakaran hutan." Miranti membujuk.

"Ya... kita saja yang ke sana saja."

Akhirnya Miranti pun menyerah. Namun dia membuat semacam penawaran pada Kasih.

"Tapi setelah itu, jika kita terpaksa harus mengungsi ke Bogor, Kasih mau ikut ya." Miranti membuat penawaran sekedarnya, dia sendiri enggan pergi meskipun akal nalarnya menyuruh dia pergi dari tempat ini.

Kasih mengangguk, meski Miranti meragukan anggukan Kasih juga sampai ke hati anak itu. Miranti merasa, Kasih seolah melihat jalan keselamatan yang lain, yang tidak bisa dia ceritakan.

Miranti memasang masker penyaring udara menutupi hidung dan mulut Kasih. Tempat pemberian makan orangutan hanya jarak yang dekat saja, jarak jalan kaki. Namun kali ini terasa sangat jauh. Miranti sangat merasa tidak aman. Dia membawa beberapa tabung oksigen kecil di dalam ranselnya, bersama air dan sedikit kudapan.

Taman Nasional gelap dan sangat berasap. Langit pun jingga, seolah turut terbakar. Udara amat panas.

Sebentar kemudian mereka sudah tiba di tempat pemberian makan. Tempat yang biasanya ramai, kini sepi dan kelabu. Tidak ada riungan para orangutan seperti biasanya.

"Pongo, sini dong," celoteh Kasih dengan riang.

Ibunya masygul membisu. Angin bertiup membawa asap yang semakin tebal. Membelah keabuan, dua sosok nampak tertatih datang dari kejauhan. Pongo dan Laksmi datang menghampiri.

"Kamu lapar, Pongo?" Kasih mengeluarkan beberapa buah pisang.

Kewarasan akal pikiran Miranti risau dengan keselamatan mereka di tengah hawa pengap kebakaran hutan ini. Tetapi seperti halnya waras itu sudah bertekuk lutut pada daya gerak hatinya. Dia membiarkan Kasih berceles riang dengan Pongo. Laksmi hanya menatap dari kejauhan seperti biasa. Tiba-tiba hidung Miranti seperti mencium bau Lukman. Bau yang dahulu pernah akrab dan kini hanya terekam dalam kenangan.

"Baumu sekarang dapat kurasakan kembali di hidungku Lukman," gumam Miranti. Bau itu mengudara di sekitar tubuh Miranti bersisihan dengan bau asap yang mematikan. Miranti tak kuasa menolak daya tarik bau itu. Dia sadar dirinya harus menggapai tabung oksigen yang dibawanya, tetapi tak dilakukannya. Bau Lukman sangat kuat membawa Miranti pada kedamaian yang selama ini dirindukannya. Kedamaian yang salah tempat, apa boleh buat. Gerah rusuh suasana hati Miranti. Udara semakin panas. Miranti limbung.

Dalam limbungnya, segala sesuatu seolah mencari jalan selamat sendiri-sendiri. Kewarasan nalar Miranti berusaha menggerakkannya untuk menyelamatkan diri segera. Namun batinnya memuai dengan bayangan kedamaian bertiga bersama Lukman dan Kasih di dalam rimba. Sementara jantung dan paru-parunya mulai memberontak kekurangan zat asam. Dengan mata berkunang-kunang dia melihat tampak Laksmi kembali merimba menggandeng tangan Pongo. Seperti tidak rela ketinggalan, Kasih pun menyeret tangan Miranti mengikuti Laksmi dan Pongo. Kaki-kaki Miranti terseok-seok mengikuti Kasih yang menjadi sangat yakin dengan langkah-langkahnya. Nampaknya mereka akan pergi menjauh ke dalam rimba ke pohon tempat memohon.

Dalam keadaan kabut itu, Miranti semakin merasakan kehadiran Lukman. Baunya semakin menguat di tengah kabut asap. Sesampai di bawah pohon tempat memohon dengan mata setengah tertutup, Miranti seolah melihat bayangan Lukman muncul tampak segar bugar dari lubuk naungan rimba yang terdalam.

Dia menyapa, "Aku telah lama menunggu kalian, Mir ...."

Miranti tersenyum. Nalarnya sudah sepenuhnya bertekuk lutut, terlebih saat melihat Kasih melompat-lompat kegirangan menyambut Lukman.

Tidak ada asap dan gemertak suara ranting terbakar. Hanya suara Lukman yang bening menyapa. Tidak ada cukong sawit dan mandor

The wind carried the thickening smoke. Parting the gray air, two limping figures appeared in the distance. Pongo and Laksmi were coming closer.

"Are you hungry, Pongo?" Kasih took out a few bananas.

Miranti worried about their safety in the midst of this forest fire's suffocating air. But her rational mind buckled again under her heart's impulse. She let Kasih chat happily with Pongo, as Laksmi watched from a distance as usual. Suddenly, Miranti caught Lukman's aroma — the scent that had once been so familiar, now had become only a memory.

"I can smell your presence, Lukman," murmured Miranti. His scent seemed to envelope her along with the deadly smoke. Miranti could not resist the scent's appeal. She realized she needed the oxygen cylinder she carried, but she didn't reach for it. The scent of Lukman was very strong. It brought Miranti the peace she had been longing for. It didn't seem to matter that it was a misplaced peace.

The air was getting hotter.

Miranti staggered.

In her confusion, everything seemed to seek its own way of survival. Miranti's sensibilities tried to move her to save Kasih and herself immediately. Instead, she lulled herself into the notion of peace with Lukman and Kasih in the forest. Meanwhile, her heart and lungs battled oxygen deficiency. Light-headed, she saw Laksmi take Pongo's hand and walk back into the woods. Not wanting to be left behind, Kasih grabbed Miranti's hand and followed them without hesitation.

Miranti, still stunned at the crossroads of destiny, lumbered along. In the choking fog, Lukman's presence was even more apparent. After they arrived at the Caring Tree, his scent grew stronger, overpowering the smog. Through her half-closed eyes, Miranti saw Lukman's shadow appear from the deepest shade of the woods. Looking refreshed, he said, "I've been waiting for the two of you for a long time, Mir."

Miranti smiled. As she watched Kasih happily greet Lukman, her sensibilities left her completely.

There was no smell of smoke, no crackle of burning branches — there was only Lukman's voice greeting her clearly. There were no palm oil barons and foremen. The forest was still virgin like the first time the universe made it. All living things were spirits in good health, who had left their frail and problem-riddled bodies behind.

Lukman bent to pick up Kasih. "Let your mother finish her transition, her moksha." Lukman pinched Kasih's nose playfully.

The orange sky turned red.

Miranti lay at the base of a large root of the Caring Tree.

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jahanam. Hutan pun masih sangat perawan. Seperti pertama kali semesta membuatnya. Semua makhluk hidup seolah roh yang segar bugar, meninggalkan jasad yang renta dan penuh masalah.

Lukman membungkuk untuk menggendong Kasih. "Biarkan ibumu menyelesaikan moksanya," kata Lukman mencubit hidung Kasih.

Langit jingga telah menjadi merah.

Miranti terbaring dengan landasan akar besar Pohon Tempat Memohon.

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